CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

Interview with JAMIE RASKIN
Interviewed by Betty King

Jamie Raskin was 15 years old the summer of 1978 when he worked for Marion Barry's election as Mayor of DC. At the time of this interview, he is a three-term Democratic State Senator in Maryland and the Senate Majority Whip. A professor of constitutional law at American University's Washington College of Law for the last 25 years, Jamie has also taught at Yale Law School. On April 26, 2016, in an energetic grassroots campaign, Jamie captured the Democratic nomination for Congress in Maryland's District 8 and in January 2017 he took his seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

9 September 2016

BK: Today is Friday, September 9th, 2016. My name is Betty King, and I'm talking to Maryland Senator Jamie Raskin, who is also the Democratic nominee to be Maryland member of Congress. And thank you very much for talking to us.

JR: It is totally my pleasure. I've been looking forward to it.

BK: Now tell me, when did you first meet Marion Barry? Do you remember?

JR: Well, you see, I got introduced to him by Ivanhoe Donaldson, who was a hero of mine since I was a little boy. And he was very close with my dad. He had been a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. I think Marion Barry had been also, but I didn't really remember him or know him as a kid. But I knew Ivanhoe very well, and Ivanhoe came over to visit my parents one night, and I was fifteen years old so I think was a junior in high school, and he said, "What are you doing next summer?" And I said, "I don't know. I was maybe going to go to camp. I don't know." And he said, "Well, why don't you come and work on the Marion Barry for Mayor Campaign?" And I said, "Really?" I'd never had a real job before. And he said, "Yeah." He said, "I'll pay you and everything. You can come work on the campaign." And I said, "Can I write some speeches?"

He said, "Well, you can try to do that, but I want you to get young people involved. You can be in charge of Youth for Barry. I want you involved here in Ward 1." At that point, my family lived in Adams Morgan, on Wyoming Avenue. So, I didn't really know that much about the wards and precincts and all that stuff, but the minute he said that I started to learn all of it. And that must have been in the spring of 1978. And every time I saw him, I kept reminding him that he was going to give me a job. And sure enough, I went down on the first day of summer vacation. I think I went to Rehoboth Beach for like a week with a group of friends. And I got back, and I went down to see Ivanhoe. He said, "You ready to go to work?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, let's figure out what we're going to pay you." I remember he took out a calculator, and he was punching in all these numbers. And we were in that office down on 13th and G, was it?

BK: The Miller Fur Store.

JR: Yeah, exactly, 13th and G, the Metro Center.

BK: I think it was certainly G Street, yeah.

JR: Yeah, it was G Street. So, I took the Metro –

BK: You were down in the basement, in his office?

JR: Yeah, I went down in the basement, and we talked for a while about the campaign. He told me where he thought we were in all eight wards of the city in terms of who was supporting who and where we were picking up support. But he felt like things were going well, but he needed to make sure that the liberal whites were going to be with Marion Barry and he somehow thought I could play a role in that at fifteen years old. So, he said, "We got to work out your contract." And he took out this calculator, started punching in all these numbers. After about five minutes, he said, "I'll pay you a hundred

dollars a week," which to me was like I just won the lottery. I couldn't believe I was going to get a hundred dollars a week. But he certainly got his money's worth because –

BK: You got a hundred dollars a week. I got two hundred dollars a week.

JR: I mean I was working seven days a week. I know you were working seven days a week.

BK: We all were.

JR: Yeah. And I had all these different roles. I did whatever Ivanhoe asked me to do. But I did learn all the precincts within Ward 1, helped to create like a precinct structure out of that. I worked very closely with Marshall Brown, who is the real Ward 1 coordinator, but I was kind of like his deputy and would go bring stuff to the precinct people and talk to people. But then also we started this Youth for Barry thing and I was out there getting kids all over the city involved however I could.

BK: Well, now tell me about the other – I've interviewed Norm Nixon.

JR: Norm Nixon, yes.

BK: And Charlie Siegel was part of that, too.

JR: Yes, indeed.

BK: He was older. He was, like, nineteen.

JR: He had, like, a real role in the campaign. I think he had a serious –

BK: Well, so did you.

JR: Well, I guess I did, but I saw him as – was he, like, a press secretary or a deputy campaign manager?

BK: No. No. Florence Tate was the press secretary. But he was doing organizing probably in Ward 3. And his sister, his young sister was in. And who else? Do you remember any of the others –

JR: Well, I remember Charlie Siegel. I remember the people that I got involved. I got a group of about twenty or thirty kids involved, and they would come out to the events. So, you basically would mobilize me, and I would mobilize them. And you would say, "We've got to get a whole bunch of people out to this rally," where we would go knock on doors. We did these things where we would get the cars in a kind of cavalcade.

BK: With the bullhorn making a terrible noise and so forth. And then later the bus. Do you remember the –

JR: I remember the bus.

BK: The English two-story bus.

JR: I remember the bus well. So, I organized this group of kids.

BK: Now were those mostly friends of yours?

JR: I started with friends of mine, but then it started to be kids from all over the city. But one person who got involved real early was a girl named Cokey Adams, whose father was Senator Brock Adams. And I've stayed in touch with Cokey. She went to NCS [National Cathedral School]. And she was the sweetest kid in the world. She was really quite shy, but she would come to everything. There was a girl named Lizzie Sagland who came to a lot of stuff. And then, of course, Anne and Alice Albright, whose mom is Madeleine Albright [later Secretary of State in the President Clinton administration]; they would come to everything. I loved them. I was in love with both Anne and Alice Albright, the twins, and I've stayed in close touch with those guys. They were very active.

My friend, Tony Viorst, [whose mother was a well-known author and] who lived in Cleveland Park; he got involved and he would come and do stuff. And my friend, Kamal Ali,

whose family owns Ben's Chili Bowl [on U Street, NW]; Kamal got involved. He was a buddy of mine. I don't know. I think part of Ivanhoe's strategy was you get the kids involved, and then it pulls their parents in. And that's something that I learned. It was a way to get into all of these families.

BK: And into the schools, for God's sakes.

JR: And into the schools, absolutely.

BK: You go back at the – in September, before the election –

JR: It was September 17th, was that the election day? Do you remember, the primary?

BK: No, it was the 12th.

JR: September 12th, okay.

BK: September 12th was the primary.

JR: Was the primary, yeah.

BK: The November date didn't matter that much, because we did have Fletcher running against us.

JR: Arthur Fletcher.

BK: Yeah, but he was obliterated.

JR: I don't know. None of us had ever worked on campaigns before. Nobody knew anything about it. But also, the whole political culture of Washington was just forming, and so we didn't realize that we were part of actually creating something new. And people later were astonished to learn that Barry ran as the reform candidate. I mean my friends, later in law school, couldn't believe that I knew Marion Barry quite well, and that he had started out as a reformer. He had been endorsed by *The Washington Post* against [incumbent DC Mayor] Walter Washington, [incumbent chairman of DC City Council]

Sterling Tucker, who were much more the establishment candidates. And Barry had organized basically this big reform movement, with the LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] community and young people. And the liberals and progressives really were behind him.

BK: And women, too, he was very supportive of women.

JR: Yeah, he was very into women's rights. Yeah, he captured my sense of what Washington was and I think still is, which is a place where a lot of reformers and dreamers come. I know that Tom Sherwood [reporter on the *Washington Post*, later reporter on the local NBC TV station] used the phrase "dream city" kind of ironically or subversively in his book about the whole thing. And there were mirage-like aspects to what was going on. But I got to say that that first campaign tapped and mobilized a lot of idealism about what Washington was and could be.

BK: Absolutely, because prior to that, Walter Washington was the first elected mayor, but he had also been the appointed mayor, appointed by [President] Lyndon Johnson. And at that time, the city government was run as an agency of the federal government.

JR: That's right. It was very hierarchical. And there was the sense that the feds were really in control. There was not much local involvement.

BK: And nothing changed during that first four years.

JR: And nothing changed, yeah.

BK: Walter Washing was –

JR: And that was the image that we all had of Walter Washington, that he was somebody to be respected.

BK: Nice guy, classy fellow.

JR: Somebody to be revered. Yeah, classy guy. But he was very much part of the old political culture of Washington. And Marion Barry was trying to tap this sense that there was a new era upon Washington, D.C., with the advent of Home Rule and the ability of people to choose their own leaders and to be involved. And young people were very attracted to that and engaged by it. When I asked people to be involved, either they would just say yes immediately, because nobody had ever asked them to do anything politically before, or they might sometimes say, "Well, do I get to meet Marion Barry?" And I'd say, "Yes, I will guarantee that you can meet Marion Barry."

BK: In fact, you will not be able to avoid it.

JR: No. No.

BK: Because he was everywhere.

JR: I remember – well, towards the end of the campaign, I started – I don't know how I got pulled into this, but I started traveling around with Marion, I think for the last two or three weeks. And they used to pick me up at my house at like 6:30 in the morning to go out. And I remember very clearly, we would drive through neighborhoods and Marion would say, "We had a sign on that pole over there. It's gone. Make sure we get a sign on that pole." Then we would write it down, and we would go put a sign there later. Or, "So and so had a sign up at their house. It's not there. See if something is wrong or if somebody just stole their sign or whatever." I mean he was a detailed guy.

BK: Oh, he was amazing.

JR: He was really on top of it. And I learned a lot from him about responsiveness and how politicians have to be really servants of the people. Even with everything that happened to him, I never forgot how he had captured people's idealism in that first campaign. And

of course, I felt terrible about a lot of the things that happened later. But that's a lesson, too, about politics.

BK: Absolutely. And the harm he did was to himself. He never put his hand in the kitty. He never was less concerned about the district and so forth. But his demons took control of him.

Now, was Kwame Holman [traveled during the 1978 campaign with Barry; later a reporter on the PBS NewHour] driving Marion when you all were there?

JR: Yes. Kwame would come and pick me up, and then we'd go out.

BK: Now on election day, were you working in Precinct 1?

JR: Precinct 25, in Ward 1.

BK: Heavy-duty precinct?

JR: Yeah. And then I traveled around a bit. I remember there was a guy who clearly had some kind of mental disorder, who came by screaming and saying, "Walter Washington has already won it. Everybody go home. Walter Washington has already won." But it was a heavy turnout, it was an exciting election, people were into it. And I remember the party very well. It was a huge, just exuberant crowd.

BK: You mean at the Harambee House?

JR: Yeah. I'll never forget that. Everybody who did anything in the campaign was there, and even some people who did nothing, who then pretended they were part of the campaign.

BK: Yes, when Marion and Effi [his wife] came down and he called his staff up on the platform, we had to elbow people off who we'd never seen before.

JR: Well, victory has a thousand parents. Defeat is an orphan. But, no, I just learned so much from that campaign, and it's where I got my taste for multiracial, multiethnic

organizing and making sure that everything is totally integrated in the campaign. I loved that, and basing everything in progressive values, I loved that. And then also not being afraid to run as an underdog and not being afraid to run as an outsider. And my first campaign for the state Senate, I was a huge underdog. I ran against a thirty-two-year incumbent who was president pro tem of the Senate, and people were telling me I was going to have to leave Maryland when it was all over because I'd be driven out.

But the story I love to tell is how there was an article in *The Washington Post* in which this pundit was quoted as saying that Raskin's chances of victory were considered impossible. And nine months later, we got 67 percent of the vote. And another pundit said at that point, "Raskin's victory was inevitable." So, it went from impossible to inevitable in nine months. But I think I got my taste for underdog politics in that first campaign that Marion Barry did, because he was definitely the underdog there.

I remember in the campaign, there was this huge moment when everybody was waiting to see what Polly Shackleton was going to do. She was the councilwoman from Ward 3, of course. And it was like a big crisis moment, because I think Marion was spending a lot of time with her to try to convince her to do it but she decided she was going to go with Sterling Tucker. And she made that announcement, and everybody was really upset by it. But I remember – this was probably my biggest contribution to the campaign. Everybody went outside. I guess Ivanhoe decided there was going to be a press conference to discuss it. Maybe there was going to be a release of some other endorsements that Marion got.

BK: Yeah, John Ray endorsed us.

JR: John Ray.

BK: And some other people, but John Ray abandoned his campaign and endorsed us.

JR: John Ray, that's right, endorsed Marion Barry. So, that was sort of like the counter to the Polly Shackleton thing. So, the whole staff went outside, a bunch of volunteers and everything. And I looked around, and I realized that everybody was just standing there, and nobody had any signs. And I said, "Ivanhoe, can we have some signs?" He said, "Go get them." So, I ran inside, and I brought out like fifty signs that said, "I stand with Barry," or "Stand with Barry." Is that right?

BK: "Stand with Barry," or also another of our slogans was –

JR: "Take a stand."

BK: "Take a stand," that was it.

JR: "Take a stand," yeah.

BK: And the other was "The way things ought to be." But "Take a stand."

JR: "Take a stand," and "I stand with Barry," and they were black and white and I remember just passing them out. And then all the pictures in the papers and everything had people holding these signs, so I was very proud of that.

BK: They were black and white, because we couldn't afford multicolor.

Later, in 1980, when Marion established the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council, were you in that summer program?

JR: So, I went off to college in – right after Marion's campaign, I was a senior in high school, so I graduated and I went off to Harvard.

BK: So, you graduated in '79?

JR: Yeah, I graduated in '79. And this was a really nice thing. I was taking the train up to Harvard from Union Station, and they had a goodbye party for me. And Marion came to

it, and he brought like one of those proclamations or resolutions. And now I do those all the time. I mean there's not much to it. But I tell you, I felt like it –

BK: Oh, listen, it's great when you get it.

JR: It was amazing. I mean he declared it "Jamie Raskin Day" or something. And he just said what an amazing job I had done for the people of the city working with him. And I was off to college. But he was there with all of my friends and my high-school girlfriend and everything. It was awesome.

BK: He did a proclamation for my father's birthday one year, when he was here. And he does it for Dental Hygiene Day and so forth. It doesn't matter. When you get one, it's the best thing that ever happened.

JR: It was a big deal. And I learned the importance of those resolutions and proclamations for people to get that kind of official recognition. I mean recognition is one of the things that's most unequally distributed in society, maybe even more than wealth, although it's gotten so terrible with wealth. I mean some people get recognized all the time. You get elected to office, they start giving you awards for just voting, I mean for nothing.

BK: For just waking up in the morning and breathing.

JR: And there's some people who never get recognition, so it is a big deal to recognize people for what they do. And Marion Barry was good at that. I remember when I was leaving to get on that train, I felt like it was the last scene in the *Wizard of Oz*, where the wizard came out and gave everybody something that meant something to them.

BK: So, you weren't part of the Mayor's Youth Leadership.

JR: I was. So, Ivanhoe hired me I think for my first summer job after college.

BK: That would be 1980.

JR: Yeah. I mean I was still a kid. I went to college at like sixteen years old, so I think I was sixteen or seventeen. And I was in the Mayor's Youth Leadership Conference, yeah, and there was like a big assembly of all the kids there.

BK: You went for two weeks to Howard University or something like that?

JR: Yeah, there was some training. I don't remember there was much to it. And then I worked for Ivanhoe, I worked in the deputy mayor's office. That's what I did. That was my assignment, and I spent the summer doing that. And then the next summer I worked on Capitol Hill, and the next summer I worked for – so that was the last time I – but I did get a summer job for youth as they say.

BK: Because that Mayor's Youth Leadership program and the Summer Youth Employment program, I mean, at Marion's funeral there must have been hundreds of middle-aged people who were saying –

JR: They got their first job.

BK: "He saved my life. I got my first job. I've been on the straight-and-narrow. I've got a good job now. My kids are going to college."

JR: That was my situation. I got my first two paychecks, one from the Barry campaign, and the next from the city government. It's not a lot of money, but grownups forget what a big deal it is for someone to get a paycheck regularly and feel like they're being recognized in that way, and that their work is being validated. So, Barry understood that. He had a connection with young people. He really did.

BK: Oh, yes, he had a connection with people. You can put the period early.

JR: He had a connection with people, but he loved young people, and he inspired young people.

BK: And he had made a huge difference in the city. I mean so much of it was obliterated by the Vista Hotel arrest and so forth, but he did make a huge difference in the city, huge.

JR: Yeah. I remember, at that point I was away at college and then law school so I was watching it from afar.

BK: Where did you go to law school?

JR: At Harvard. I remember the slogan in the first campaign was "Take a stand." And then everybody was joking that his slogan for his reelection was "Take the stand." I mean he really became an object of ridicule and contempt. And it was a painful thing to watch when you knew him and you saw what he had done to himself. It was very self-destructive behavior, with the drugs.

BK: But he had single-handedly created the black middle class in the District of Columbia, and made a much leveler playing field for minorities in business and civic affairs.

JR: He did. And you meet people all the time who were products of that period. And a lot of them actually ended up in Maryland, in Prince George's County. There is a whole group of people who –

BK: One of the people we interviewed said that Marion had created PG County.

JR: A lot of them did end up leaving, being successful in business and contracting, and they moved to Prince George's County. And Prince George's County does include the most successful, prosperous black middle class in the country.

BK: Many of whom started out in the District and got their start under the Barry administrations. So, it was great.

JR: I mean there was something that was old-school about Barry in terms of the kinds of mayors, like Mayor Curley in Boston, the kinds of mayors who came to power who were

very attentive to different constituencies. Of course, the main one in his case was to create a black business class and a black middle class through contracting and through using the city government, and that was legit, in addition to all the civil-rights and civil-liberty stuff he was doing.

BK: Well, I wish you great luck. I'm so proud of you running for Congress. Your campaign is going well?

JR: Yeah, well, the primary was where I paid my dues. It was a nine-person race. It was the most expensive congressional primary in American history, and I got outspent by more than ten to one by my opponents. But we ran a very vibrant grassroots campaign all over the District.

BK: I know you did, because I've talked to friends of mine who were involved. That's great.

JR: So, it was exciting. And thank you for reawakening all these memories of my childhood.

BK: It was great, and thank you for being part of this.

JR: Entirely my pleasure.

[End of Interview]